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ABSTRACT

The time to make positive changes in foreign language education programs and instruction has come. The first step in effecting change is to find out about the students' language backgrounds, interests, and intentions for their language skills. Language instruction can take many different emphases: foreign language and international studies, language and intercommunity understanding, understanding the process of communication, languages for specific purposes or career preparation, and language as the key to humanistic studies. Future college teachers need to be trained to develop curriculum and to use effective, participatory teaching techniques in addition to content. An appropriate approach for college second language teaching is an interactive one. This approach has the following advantages: it allows for teacher and learner individuality because it is not teacher-dominated; it implies purposeful learning; it succeeds in a situation without tension or alienation; it requires emotional maturity and indirect leadership; it encourages teacher innovation and student participation; it does not preclude learning grammar; and it uses the interaction that is typical of literature. (MSE)

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Languages at College: The Student and the Curriculum

Wilga M. Rivers

Things are certainly happening in foreign language. Every journal we pick up contains good news. For instance, at the University of Wisconsin/Madison, enrollments are up in all foreign language departments. This they attribute to student concern over international tensions and recognition that foreign language skills improve job opportunities. At Stanford University, future transcripts will carry a notation if students are proficient in foreign languages (they must demonstrate ability roughly equivalent to the knowledge of an excellent student late in the third quarter of the third year of study). At Harvard, the retiring Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Henry Rosovsky, told the newly appointed Dean, Michael Spence: "The tasks for the next decade include increasing attention to international studies, foreign languages, and interdisciplinary approaches to the social sciences." And finally, the Mellon Fellowship Committee observes that many of the candidates for Mellon Fellowships are ill-prepared in foreign languages, and that they will be requiring candidates in the future to demonstrate this capacity.

Where are we in relation to these new opportunities? In a recent article in Daedalus (1983), Dr. Marlies Mueller reported on what she observed in schools in an unnamed industrial city in the northeast. For purposes of anonymity, she called this city Libertyville. Some quotations will demonstrate what she found:

> . . . In class after class purporting to teach students to understand, read, write and speak a foreign language, the language is spoken only in bone-dry grammar exercises, never in an authentic exchange of ideas or information. (Mueller, 5:229)

I wonder if these teachers are teaching as they were taught? Isn't this what we see too often in undergraduate language classes? We need to move forward if the opportunities of the present moment are to be grasped.

How do we begin to design change? First of all, there is no language teaching enterprise without customers, that is, our students. Who are your students? Have you ever taken the trouble to find out? Your students are not necessarily the same as mine; however, I would like to share with you some things I found out about my own students in two quite different places.

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At the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana in 1972 (quite a long time ago and still at the height of the period when colleges were dropping foreign-language requirements at a rapid rate) I found that three-fifths of the students were enjoying the language study in elementary and intermediate classes, despite all the slogans and the pressure to express other views. Only one-third of our students were against requirements and opposed to studying language. The proportion would probably be less today, with less peer-pressure and a new awareness of international opportunities. At Harvard in 1980, we found that 86% were enjoying their first-year courses and 77% their intermediate courses (the latter level being where the disappointed people who "just failed the requirement" are lodged). I also found a broad interest in learning to understand and speak the language (two-thirds of the students) as well as to read and write it. Do they achieve these goals in our early classes? If not, why not? With the right approach, we can certainly help them to express themselves in a simple, comprehensible way, as well as reading interesting contemporary material of a general nature.

It was at the University of Illinois in 1972 that I found out how many of our students in advanced language classes were not majors or concentrators (42%). At Harvard with a different student population with different aspirations, a decade later, the percentage of non-majors in advanced language classes is more like 95%. This is because our program has been different in that it has largely been designed for non-concentrators (that is, non-majors). On the other hand, here at Harvard in 1980, I found other things. Teachers tend to say, "I wonder how many years they've studied the language before coming into this class?" This is such a frequent question among the teachers of first-year classes. I set out to find out the answer, that is, to see how many people in our first-year classes had studied the foreign language for two, three, four, or five years and still failed to pass the Harvard Placement Exam which decides our requirement level. My investigation showed that in Spanish only 35% of the first-year students were raw beginners, and 45% in French. In Spanish, 55% of the first-semester students had already studied the language for from two to five years; in French, 36% had already studied the language for from two to five years; in Italian, 97% were genuine beginners and in Portuguese, 100%. Surely figures

like these should influence our approach to the elementary class. They should also make us ask ourselves why so many students seem to have gained so little from long years of toil with the language. No wonder they feel frustrated and imposed upon.

I also found that nearly 50% of elementary level students intended to continue their study of the language, although the requirement would be fulfilled at the end of the year. Of our first-year French group, 35% were non-requirement students. We needed to ask ourselves whether we were meeting the needs of these students. At the advanced level (fifth and sixth semester language classes) up to 96% were enjoying their study of the language and two-thirds intended to study it to a still higher level. Only seven percent of these students were fulfilling a departmental requirement. Of these advanced students, a mere fifth were studying for professional reasons; the personal pleasure rate was very high--from 80 to 90%. Most of these advanced students had already studied the language for four, five, or six years elsewhere and their enthusiasm was unquenchable. I remember one freshman at Harvard who came into my office and said, "I've studied French since fourth grade and I just have to have a French class." This was certainly a compliment to a number of teachers he had encountered during his high-school years.

What is the point of my telling you all these things about other programs? How does it concern you? It shows what interesting and useful information we can gather about our students if we are interested in them. You may want to find out quite different things within you own program. In the University of Illinois survey, I was interested to know the fields in which the students were intending to use their language and what kind of content they were interested in. The results were very interesting.

Of the concentrators, 57% expected to teach the language (the 10% who had no plans would probably teach the language anyway, due to lack of other outlets), but the electives expected to use their knowledge in science, anthropology, philosophy, music, journalism, business, aviation, law, inner-city medicine, linguistics, engineering, social work at home, social and religious service abroad, in diplomacy, international law, interpreting, library science, advertising, speech therapy, archaeology, astrophysics, and, as one student put it, "active service in today's action army." All of these

areas and many more were cited by particular students. To which we may add today international business, banking, and international agencies (World Health, etc.). At Harvard, I was preparing preventive data for a threatened reconsideration of the existing moderate, proficiency-oriented requirement. We have many purposes in collecting information of this kind and yours will be different from mine, but I urge you to think seriously about collecting information on the kinds of students in your courses, their backgrounds, and their interests.

As a result of these questionnaires I was able to design a varied array of courses to suit student needs, particularly at the post-requirement level, and at Harvard, as at the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana previously, we have been attracting students in droves ever since. We've had a 66% increase in student enrollment over the past decade. Our problem is not finding courses for our graduate students and language-teaching personnel to teach, but finding enough instructors for the courses (and enough money from the Dean to pay for all this!); but where there are students, there is a way.

What directions can our curriculum take? In "The Revolution Now: Revitalizing the University Language Departments" (which you will find in my book, Speaking in Many Tongues, 3rd Edition, Cambridge University Press, 1983), I have proposed five directions for a language program. Without going through all the details in that article, I will touch on these briefly. First of all it seems to me that our real work at college is in our advanced language classes and I will try to give you some ideas of the ways in which these can be designed. In The Chronicle of Higher Education of May 2, 1984, there was an article quoting from a report prepared for the Defense Department by the Association of American Univerities, in which Professor Richard Lambert of the University of Pennsylvania, the Director of the study, is quoted as saying that the "first priority" for resolving the country's problems in advanced training in foreign languages and area studies was to "transform and upgrade the language teaching at the advanced levels." We do well to keep this in mind for the future health of our departments.

1. Foreign Language and International Studies. This direction is an obvious new alignment, even without the recommendations of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies. Since departmental

divisions are deep, this direction requires the establishment of contacts by concerned individuals. As foreign language teachers we are not the experts at college-level and international studies, but we can provide an auxiliary skill. Courses with this intention in mind are best team-taught with experts from international studies, while the language department conducts discussion sections on contemporary material in the language. (At Monash University in the 1960s we already had courses in French philosophy, French history, French psychology, and French governmental institutions.)

To take part in such a program the foreign language instructor must be well-read and must keep on reading. This direction of foreign language and international studies can be linked with study abroad programs, preferably home stay programs, but certainly ones in which students have definite research projects which take them into the community, or working internships like those established with France by the Atlantic Alliance.

2. Language and Intercommunity Understanding. Learning to accept difference and to cooperate with "different" others are important skills in the modern world. A unit on using the telephone in another country or on metric measures does not insure this kind of understanding. Neither does talking about facts and details of another culture. Students must learn to cope within another culture, and for this they need personal contact where possible with the other culture, or at least vicarious contact. They need to "see" the other culture on its own terms and recognize their own prejudices and assumptions. For this, they need visual contact (video, television, satellite, illustrated reading material, and experience in studying possible points of conflict between cultures). Open scenarios where students work out dilemmas, culture capsules, vigorous discussion of how people behave and react in the other culture--all these are helpful. But study of another culture is not just points of conflict. Appreciation of shared values and institutions should also receive emphasis. Particularly in high school, we should ask ourselves why we teach about one other culture, instead of sharing across languages what students are learning about several different cultures. This is a rich area that is in no way being exhausted as content for language courses.

3. Understanding the Process of Communication. How meanings are expressed, how languages function in social situations, and the pragmatics of discourse are all important areas which should be covered. The work of Professor Laurence Wylie gives us a lead, with his emphasis on nonverbal communication: the ways we express our real meaning in harmony with, or even in contradiction to, the words we use. His emphasis on "getting them out of their Americay body" is important, as students realize the contributions of body movements, facial expressions, and the slight movements of eyebrow, head, hand, shoulder. They need to understand cultural differences and the distance we keep between ourselves and others; the ways we touch and avoid; the degree of eye-contact we maintain; the effect of loudness of voice and emphasis; the uses of silence, and so on. These nonverbal aspects of communication become strikingly obvious to us when we see films or even pictures of people communicating in another language and relating to each other in another culture. When we give structured conversation groups or unstructured "oral survival" classes, we need to more than have students prepare long oral reports to which others listen, often in boredom, asking perhaps a few stilted questions. For students to understand the process of communication, they must be continually giving and receiving meanings, structured as much as possible in ways which would be acceptable within the culture.

4. Languages for Specific Purposes or Career Preparation. At college level, languages for specific purposes should not be limited to Reading for Graduate Students as a Ph.D. requirement, although this is an important course and can be done well. There is need for teaching reading for information in individualized ares of concern for others than Ph.D. students. However, Spanish, French, or German for Business also come into this area, and both Paris and Madrid offer a Certificate of Competency in relation to such courses. These will be more useful if contacts are made with the Business School and if they are designed with the needs of business communities in the area in mind. Spanish and Portuguese for the Professions will prepare students for jobs where they have to come in contact with disadvantaged groups who speak these languages, and such courses are useful for future doctors, lawyers, firefighters, police personnel, and so on. Italian is very useful for music majors and majors in architecture and archaeology, as, of course,

are other languages. The differences between general language courses and courses for specific purposes are not just in the area of vocabulary. Some career-oriented courses will emphasize aural-oral ability, others facility in reading or writing reports. The functional notional approach is very useful in such endeavors, and instructors need to familiarize themselves with the work situations that the different careers provide.

5. Language as the Key to Humanistic Studies. This must never be neglected. Here I am not speaking just of literary criticism but of literary appreciation and involvement of literature and the philosophy of the speakers of the language. Humanistic studies are essential to counteract the over-technologization and impersonalization of the present-day world, but we have to realize that a true understanding and appreciation of what the writer had to say to his reader can come only when the student has sufficient knowledge of the language to appreciate it. Texts can be used from the very first week, if carefully selected. Poems and short plays, as well as short stories and folk-tales, are very appropriate for early stages. Literary content, well-chosen, makes for an exciting, interesting course. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we know that these courses are successful when they attract non-literature concentrators and when students, after the course, go on to read more of the work of the authors they have studied. In courses of this nature, there must be plenty of room for discussion, for expression of divergent thinking, for developing flexible minds and articulateness in well-read individuals. We must not leave World Literature to other departments when we ourselves have so much to give in bringing them in touch with the texts as written by the original writers.

Who carries out these changes? We may ask who will be the person who will be sufficiently interested to carry these changes right through all the process involved within departments and within faculties. Will this be done by the professors of literature, or by junior faculty also trained in literature and literary-oriented? Adjunct faculty, too, are usually literature-trained and poorly respected, while being over-loaded, within their departments. Are graduate students to be urged to create these courses, when they have their dissertations to concentrate on (the latter are also overworked and poorly paid)? There is a need for those who will be in charge

of language development to be re-trained or trained differently. Many ideas on the development of undergraduate and graduate programs, as seen by junior faculty from a number of universities, can be found in my article, "Preparing College and University Instructors for a Lifetime of Teaching: A Luxury or a Necessity?" (ADFL Bulletin, 15(2), November 1983). Most of the respondents to my inquiries, as reported in this article, emphasize the need for proper training for the language work on which they would spend most of their career, and this kind of preparation should include the development of curriculum. As teachers we are a lecturing group. We lecture in literature, in linguistics, in culture, and then, if not checked, we tend to lecture on grammar in language classes. Our future faculty need to learn to give way and let students express themselves, to direct more group work, to tolerate less than the perfectly accurate when students are expressing themselves. A number of universities around the country are coming to the conclusion that the training of graduate fellows or assistants in teaching must be given serious consideration. Perhaps our hope for more fully developed undergraduate language programs lies with the junior faculty who are now coming into our universities and colleges. However, we must not wait for things to happen but rather make them happen in our own situation.

How do we teach languages at college? This is the last question, not the first. Curriculum comes before methodology. There is no "best" method, fortunately. There are methods and combinations of techniques, and most new methods fall into the latter category. What we need in college-language teaching is an interactive approach. I will now briefly set out ten aspects of an interactive approach. More information will be obtained from a book which I am currently editing, to be called The Interactive Approach, which will in all probability appear from Cambridge University Press in late 1985.

Features of the Interactive Approach.

1. The interactive approach allows for individuality on the part of both the learner and the teacher. The most effective learning takes place when both student and teacher are at ease in the situation.

2. Success in communicative language learning can be attributed to a great deal of interaction: teacher-student, student-student, student-community. We see this in the most successful direct method, audio-lingual

method, community-language learning, natural approach, Dartmouth Intensive Method, and in immersion programs.

3. Understanding other individuals and appreciating their uniqueness and their unique needs is essential for genuine interaction. This is not possible when someone is manipulating or directing others. Therefore, the interactive approach is not teacher-directed or dominated. Interaction can be two-way, three-way, four-way, but never one-way.

4. The teacher steps out of dead-center and sees a place in decision-making and initiating to the student, accepting all kinds of opinions and being tolerant of errors the student makes in attempting to communicate.

5. The interactive approach implies purposeful, task-oriented learning. Students do things together for which they use the language. Drama, songs, music, games, even dance are important. Simulation games, extemporized skits, or vigorous arguments and discussions are frequent activities.

6. Interaction cannot take place where there is tension or alienation. The teacher needs skill and patience to defuse, relax, enthuse, and attract, allowing students to express what is in them.

7. The interactive approach requires the highest degree of indirect leadership and emotional maturity. Imagination, perceptiveness, and sensitivity are better than any bag of techniques or tricks. We teach and interact most effectively, according to our own personality.

8. The interactive approach encourages teacher innovation and promotes student participation. The interaction may be quiet or noisy, assured and vigorous, or indirect. No one approach ensures a direction, which comes from the mix of teacher and student in any particular situation.

9. Interaction does not preclude the learning of the grammatical system. We interact better if we can understand and express nuances of meaning.

10. Finally, interaction is what literature is about--writers interacting with their readers and readers interacting with the text. Interaction can also take place in the writing of poems and essays and in the creation of short stories and scenes, as well as the enjoyment and creation of folk-tales and proverbs.

In conclusion I would like to quote from a junior faculty member who responded to my recent questionnaire.

I think that I would want to emphasize the sense in which language-teaching at the college level differs greatly from the teaching that goes on in other subjects. It is a very special opportunity, both for instructor and student, for actively engaging in a process, rather than reporting on some process from the outside. Learning to communicate is a magical phenomenon, and one which can be for the college student a deeply satisfying, even stabilizing psychological and emotional force.

If we allow imagination, innovation, and individuality to be our watchwords in our college programs, then perhaps this will be so.